



## How Do I Get Started With Increasing My Physical Activity?

### **Safety First:**

- ✓ Ask your MOVE staff member whether you need to see a doctor before beginning a program of physical activity.
- ✓ Stop exercising immediately if you experience any of the following:
  - severe chest pain, tightness, pressure or discomfort
  - severe shortness of breath
  - severe nausea or vomiting
  - sudden onset one-sided arm/leg weakness or changes in sensation
  - difficulty swallowing, talking, or seeing
  - severe headache or dizziness

**CALL 911** immediately if the symptoms do not resolve within a few minutes. If you experience less severe new or worsening symptoms when beginning or increasing physical activity please see your doctor for further evaluation.

### **General Tips:**

- ✓ Start slowly, and work your way up over time to longer or harder exercise.
- ✓ Just walking is a great way to start increasing your physical activity! An early morning or after dinner walk can be delightful!
- ✓ Look for opportunities to get some extra physical activity, such as taking the stairs, parking further from the store entrance, house cleaning, gardening, yard work, dancing...
- ✓ You don't have to belong to a gym. Other good ways to exercise include water exercise classes or swimming, stationary or real bicycle, home exercise machines, calisthenics, playing ball, chasing your kids or grandkids, or anything that makes you move.
- ✓ For losing weight, exercising longer is better than exercising harder. Mild to moderate exercise will do the job.
- ✓ Aim for eventually exercising most days of each week, for at least 30 minutes. Longer is better. But don't overdo it at first. Work your way up to this.



## ***Increasing physical activity for veterans with physical or medical limitations***

The *MOVE!* team recognizes that increasing physical activity can be a challenge for some veterans with certain physical limitations or medical conditions....but it is NOT impossible! Programmed activity is just one way to increase your level of activity. See the handout "Lifestyle Activity" for more information on how to be more active without "working out".

Your *MOVE!* team is here for support and to assist you with obtaining any necessary referrals and/or equipment to ensure your safety and enjoyment.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **Do I need to see my doctor before beginning a program of physical activity?**

Many veterans can begin a program of mild or moderate activity **safely** without having a check-up from their primary care provider. Your *MOVE!* staff can tell you whether or not YOU should have a check-up before starting. In general, the following veterans should always see their provider before starting:

- Veterans with heart or lung conditions
- Veterans planning a program of "vigorous" activity



#### **What is the difference between "mild", "moderate" and "vigorous" levels of activity?**

- Mild activities are like slow walking and usually do not cause much of a sweat or trouble catching your breath.
- Moderate activities are equivalent to fast walking. This level will make your heart beat a little bit faster and may cause a light sweat, but should never cause you to be "out of breath" or exhausted.
- Vigorous activities are like jogging; they cause the heart to beat very fast with heavy sweating and some difficulty breathing.

#### **Are there certain activities I should avoid?**

Very few activities are "off-limits" See the handout "Activity Limitations" which discusses specific conditions for which restrictions apply.

### **Will I make my condition worse by exercising?**

Physical activity almost always helps improve medical conditions. Only in very rare cases will physical activity make things worse. It is wise to avoid physical activity during times when your condition is flared-up or causing you moderate or severe symptoms. Resume activity as your medical condition improves.

### **How will my medications affect my ability to exercise?**

Exercise is compatible with all medications; however, some medications require a closer watch when it comes to physical activity. Check with your primary care physician for specific information about this issue.



### **What if I'm in too much pain to exercise?**



Regular physical activity often improves chronic pain conditions, but sometimes it may take several weeks to begin to see a benefit. See your provider to discuss options if you feel your current pain is at a level that will keep you from even getting started with exercise.

### **What other resources does my VA have that can help me increase my level of physical activity?**

**Every VA facility is staffed differently and not all resources may be available at every VA. Check with your *MOVE!* team for more information.**

- **Physical therapists (PT)** work with patients that have muscle or joint problems involving the neck, back, shoulder and legs. They help you design a program of activity based on your medical condition and can often provide access to helpful equipment like exercise rubber bands or special prostheses or braces.
- **Kinesiotherapists (KT)** specialize in movement, exercise, and fitness. They evaluate your present fitness level and can help design a program of physical activity to increase your overall health and fitness. They advise you on proper exercise form and technique to minimize injury and when barriers to increasing activity are large, they may offer you creative suggestions.
- **Recreation therapists (RT)** work with patients with illness or disabilities in a variety of ways including sport, dance, and movement.
- **Doctors who specialize in chronic pain or rehabilitation** are available by referral for veterans who need them. Ask your primary care provider whether or not you would benefit from this type of referral.